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SUBJECT: TUNISIAN NOMINATION FOR INTERNATIONAL WOMEN OF
COURAGE AWARD

REF: STATE 12871

In response to reftel request, Post nominates Khedija Cherif, President of the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women, for the Secretary's International Women of Courage Award and provides the following justification and contact information:

Khedija Cherif was elected President of the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women (ATFD) in 2006. A sociologist and university professor, Cherif has a long history of civil society activism to advance women's rights in particular and human rights in Tunisia more generally. As president of the ATFD and a longtime member of the organization, Cherif manages an organization of several hundred women who seek to advance women's rights in Tunisia. The ATFD works to eliminate discrimination, defend existing legal rights, advance sexual equality, and encourage women's participation in social and political life. Despite many advances in women's rights in Tunisia, the ATFD continues to press for inheritance equality and educate the public about domestic abuse, including operating a shelter for battered women. The ATFD, due to its strong feminist leanings, also vigorously combats all forms of religious fundamentalism.

Despite being a registered NGO since 1989, the ATFD suffers from official and quasi-official harassment. Government security forces monitor ATFD events, and often individual members. Members report that the GOT has prevented ATFD awareness campaigns, restricted access to the press, blocked meetings, and instructed hotels not to rent space to ATFD for public events. Foreign funding for ATFD activities is blocked by the Tunisian Central Bank. Mail, phone and Internet communications are disrupted, both that at the ATFD offices and that of individual members. The Tunisian media denounces members as "prostitutes" and "lesbians."

In addition to her ATFD leadership, Cherif is well-known in Tunisia for her political activism. Cherif is also a former vice president of the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH) and a founding member of the unregistered NGO the National Council for Liberty in Tunisia (CNLT). Cherif has reported being harassed and assaulted for her activism. Most recently, Tunisian security forces reportedly assaulted her when she tried to attend a May 2006 LTDH anniversary event. Cherif is also active in the international human rights community and participates in many international conferences.

In 2001, she experienced inexplicable delays in passport issuance that temporarily prevented her travel abroad.

Despite these difficulties, Cherif continues her social and political activism. Her 2006 election as ATFD President has only increased her visibility in Tunisian civil society circles. Cherif is thus one of the most prominent Tunisian individuals seeking to advance women's rights and, more generally, human rights in Tunisia today.

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